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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

POLAND: Back to the Bargaining Table

Solidarity and government negotiators begin a crucial series of talks today that will demonstrate whether moderates on both sides can work out political compromises necessary for a peaceful resolution of Poland's problems. Significant forward movement on key economic issues could compensate for any failure to make marked progress on sensitive political demands. Although the willingness to begin talks indicates that the moderate points of view still predominate, they will be sorely tested in the coming months. If the talks—which could go on for months—succeed, Poland will have taken a significant step toward greater political stability. If they fail, there will be additional radicalization of Solidarity's rank and file and leadership that will substantially increase the prospects for serious clashes with the government.

At stake is the creation of the legal and institutional base for a pluralistic political structure. For the talks to succeed, the party leadership will have to relinquish de jure some of the powers that it has not been able to exercise for more than a year. Solidarity will have to be satisfied with political structures that allow the party to continue to retain the appearance of playing the leading role.

Moderates on both sides are approaching the talks in a positive and optimistic way. In the initial stages of the talks this may at least lead to a lower level of strike activity and confrontation.

The two sides have already agreed in principle on several issues, but working out the details will be a contentious process. Both party chief Jaruzelski and the union, for example, have proposed the creation of a council that would have wide social representation. Jaruzelski, however, foresees an extension of the discredited National Unity Front, whereas Solidarity has proposed a council that would have significant economic decisionmaking powers.

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347
389

Top Secret

Reform of the electoral and judicial systems and Solidarity's increased access to the media will be the most controversial and difficult political issues. Some in the union are intent on breaking the party's total monopoly on selecting candidates for elective office. Local elections are slated for February, but many in Solidarity will urge new elections to the national parliament.

Reform of the judicial process is a long-term project, and Solidarity would probably settle for prohibitions against harassment by police and prosecutors. The recent resignation of the Prosecutor General may ease the negotiations.

Some progress may be possible in giving Solidarity access to radio and television. The regime, however, has been unyielding about giving the union total control over producing programs.

The two sides also will negotiate a series of economic issues including economic reforms, worker self-management, and price increases. Some progress has already been made on these questions and further compromises are likely. The government will push especially hard for agreement on retail price increases to try to absorb some of the huge excess of money in the economy.

Opposing Stands

The union does not begin with well-defined and coordinated bargaining positions. Its leaders will have to make substantial gains in the talks if they are to keep the lid on rank-and-file discontent. The union leadership also will have to be able to demonstrate through concrete example that the government accepts Solidarity as a serious permanent bargaining partner and that the government is willing and able to implement the agreements that are reached.

Solidarity chief Walesa and his moderate colleagues will be forced into a more militant position to preserve credibility if the regime does not bargain in good faith. The rank and file will not remain passive if the government refuses to make political or economic concessions. The workers might, for example, take control of production and distribution in selected industries.

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Jaruzelski would like to draw Solidarity into his proposed "Front of National Accord" as a way of establishing a *modus vivendi* with union moderates and isolating the militants. It is not clear, however, how far he is willing to go or would be allowed to go by his hardline colleagues in granting this Front important powers. The government may conclude that concessions on some issues are necessary to create the credibility necessary to win acceptance from the populace for austerity measures.

The party chief may have more maneuvering room in these negotiations than Kania would have had. Jaruzelski is seen as a more decisive and determined leader who will not make concessions without getting something in return.

Jaruzelski reportedly has the support of the Politburo to pursue a dialogue with Solidarity. He apparently also has been given some latitude by Moscow to seek an accommodation.

Nevertheless, Jaruzelski will have to guard his flanks against criticism from hardliners at home and from the Soviets. To maintain his credibility with Moscow, Jaruzelski will have to be able to convince the Soviets that the concessions will create greater stability without destroying the party's role. (C)

If the compromises Jaruzelski is willing to accept do not satisfy Solidarity's minimum requirements, he seems willing to take forceful measures. At the same time, Jaruzelski appears aware of the possible civil strife that such actions might provoke.

The Role of the Church

The Church, under Archbishop Glemp, will continue to play the role of honest broker, encouraging and facilitating the search for compromise. Although the Church basically finds itself in support of Solidarity's goals, its influence has definite limits.

Church leaders want to prevent a breakdown of social order and a Soviet intervention, but they cannot take positions that vary significantly from the sentiments of the population. There is almost total distrust of the party and government, and the Church would risk losing some of its credibility if it sided too much with the regime.

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